

My knock at the door

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Francis Donovan

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My knock at the door arouses Mr. Botsford, who has been nodding in his Morris chair by the kitchen stove. "Come in, come in," he says. "Set down and warm yourself." The radio is going full blast with a market broadcast, but he switches it off. "Got so I sleep or read with that damn thing goin' and don't pay no attention to it half the time." Mr. Botsford stirs up his fire, sits down and lights his pipe.

"I was up to the Fellowcraft club last night," he says, "and I met an old friend of mine. Who do you think it was? Ex-governor Charley Templeton. We had quite a visit. You know Charley lived in Thomaston as a boy. His father was Theodore Templeton, used to keep the farm for Aaron Thomas. It was just like comin' home for Charley last night.

"He was our speaker. Told quite a few stories, I can't remember some of them, but he was good. Then I told 'em that story I told you about Connecticut products and inventions. Made a hit, too. Note Anecdote

"Charley told about workin' for old Ta'madge, in the store up on Plymouth Hill years ago. Old Ta'madge was as honest as the day was long, Charley said, but he expected people to be honest with him too. He never asked for nothin' and be never give nothin'. Seems old George Langdon used to come in the store regular and while he was visitin' or doin' his tradin', he'd kind of poke around and help himself to crackers, or raisins, or whatever he wanted right out of the box. Put some in his mouth and some in his pocket. At the end of the month old Ta'madge would say to Charley, 'Charles, 2 put down a pound of raisins on Mr. Langdon's bill.'

"When Charley got through talkin', as I said, I told 'em that story about Connecticut. That's the point he was makin' too, you see, about what a good little state it was and how resourceful the people are. Don't you never be ashamed of Connecticut, boy, wherever you go, even if it ain't no bigger than your hand.

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"Charley talked about inventors. Said he considered Charles Norton one of the greatest -- though he never got much credit. Charles Norton worked right here in the clock shop for years. Wrote that book I showed you. He done more for manufacturers with his inventions of abrasive machinery than any / one man you can think of.

"Yessir, boy, Connecticut is a great little state and Connecticut people are fine people. Some big fortunes been made in this state --they wasn't all made in New York. Up at Long Lake--up in the Adirondacks --half the big places was owned by Connecticut people. Note Anecdote

"You ever hear of Senator Platt? He lived right over here in Washington. You'll see his medallion up in the Capitol if you ever go over there. Well sir, he was up at Long Lake one time and he got invited to a big time. This woman that give it was named Krissand or Kissam. They was related to the William K. Vanderbilts--his middle name was Krissand--and she had one of the biggest places up there. The guests all come in boats and canoes, with their guides. Senator Platt came with his guides, and what's more he was dressed just like 'em. Well, there was one table for the guests of course, and another for the guides, and Senator 3 Platt, he got put with the guides.

"By and by somebody goes up to the woman and told her the most prominent guest was sittin' down with the guides. Right away she gets up and goes down to him and begs his pardon, and asks him to come up to the other table. But she couldn't get him to move. He said he was perfectly happy where he was.

"And when he died--he left a request that he be taken to the cemetery in his old farm wagon and that his friends up there pull the wagon. And that's the way he was buried. And a big bunch of senators come up from Washington, D.C. for the funeral too."

Mr. Botsford's pipe has been cold for some time, and he reaches for his humidior. "S'pose you're goin' to listen to the fight tonight," he says. I ask him for his opinion of it.

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"Loo-is will win," he says. "But I ain't sayin' which Loo-is." He chuckles. "No, as Theron Plumb used to say, 'Skunk or rattlesnake, I don't care which whips.' Note Anecdote

"He had some great sayin's, "The" Plumb did. Used to drink pretty heavy. I see him one time goin' to church and he hardly had a leg under him. He was pullin' on a pair of lady's silk gloves. 'Got to keep up appearances,' he says, 'even if you ain't got a cent.'

"He died up in the Soldier's home in Togas, Maine. Used to get letters from him. I worked next to "The" in the shop for a long while. They said he was too friendly with Hen Wolcott's wife. Hen was the one-armed painter. You heard stories, maybe, about one armed paper hangers? Well, Hen was a paper hanger and a 4 painter too. He was a kind of [slovenly?] worker, but he was fast. He could paint a house in a day. He painted the Cotton row in a week, and he painted the Movement shop all by himself.

"One year they was a big potato famine. You couldn't buy 'em for five dollars a bushel. But Hen Wolcott managed to raise some, some way or other. He told his wife to go easy on 'em, use the small ones first. He figured in the spring he could get a big price for them. Note Good [?]

"Spring come, and Hen went down cellar to look at his potatoes one day and they was all froze. Somebody made up a poem about him and passed it around. Some said it was his wife, I don't know. I'll never forget it, because I worked next to "The" Plumb in the shop and "The" would sing it to the tune of 'Wearin' of the Green' while Hen was paintin' the shop outside. Hen would cuss and swear every time he heard it. It made him twice as mad when "The" sang it on account of what folks said about "The" and his wife.

"It went like this: On Bristol Street there lives an ass, I need not speak his name. And both for beauty and for grace he is of Atlas fame. To everyone who sees him, he causes instant pain, For he's a nasty dauber, and you can guess his name. He rips and tears and cusses and swears at everyone he sees, Then goes into his garrett, a swearing at his

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bees The bees get mad, for it makes 'em sad, they know it's not a rose And so out from their hive they come and brand him on the nose. He walks around he slams around, and then begins to curse, And then he tells his wife to use the little potatoes first, She used the little potatoes, but as everybody knows, He went into the cellar, and found the big ones froze .

"On the top of the paper was wrote 'Lines from a Tombstone.' You see, whoever wrote it knew all about Hen. He kept bees, and 5 one time they stung him on the nose, and it swelled up like a balloon. They had it all in there, about the potatoes and all.

"Yes, there used to be some great sayin's, if I could remember them all. You know Hi Minor don't you, owns the farm up off Two Mile Bridge? Hi's got some great sayin's. One of his favorites is 'Just 'cause I say it's so don't make it so.'

Then there was the lad who asked could he go fishin' in Hi's trout stream. 'Sure you can go,' says Hi,' but don't let me catch you.' Good [?]

"You know years ago, when they had the big shows in the Opera House, a bunch of actors from New York were up in the Hash House one night and Hi was there. They give Hi a few drinks and he put on an act for 'em they said it was the greatest thing they ever saw. They said if they could get Hi down on the stage in New York and just let him act natural, he'd be the biggest hit of the year. He'd have all them imitation farmers backed off the boards, because he was the real thing, they said. But of course he couldn't do it in front of a big audience, I s'pose.

"You don't know about the big shows we used to have here, boy. They had all the big actors, Clara Louise Kellogg, Pat and Annie Rooney, Stratton and Storm. They had the Callender Minstrels, come in two parlor cars. I guess they had seventy-five niggers in the troop. They had 'Eight Bells,' with the fire engine and horses right up on the stage, and the

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Count of Monte Cristo, and Mugg's Landin', and Aphrodite with Lennie Bates, and Way Down East, with Denman Thompson..."

Mr. Botsford sighs, knocks his cold pipe against the grate. His little electric clock says quarter past five and I pick up my hat and coat. "You got a good cold walk ahead of you, young feller," he says. "Gonna be the coldest night we had this winter, radio says. Well come up again. Glad to have you."